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## SOME ISSUES AT NEW DELHI

Knowing that many readers of the Monthly Letter about Evangelism wish to share in the discussions of the World Council of Churches' Third Assembly in New Delhi we thought it might be useful to write about the agenda of one of the sections, that on "Witness". The Assembly will divide its theological discussion into three parts: "Witness", "Service", "Unity". The agenda is, of course, only a proposal to the section, but there is not much doubt that its discussions will follow more or less along the lines given in the agenda.

The agenda tries to raise some points of vital importance for the task of witness. Pioneers in evangelism will find that some of the questions have been answered already in their writings or their work, but they will be aware that many other people have yet to find their own answers. Discussion at an Assembly aims at finding out what can be said not by a few but by as many as possible of the churches represented at the meeting. At this point the vital necessity of a thorough and courageous discussion within the churches becomes apparent. Would it be possible for you to take up in your congregations or groups some of the questions given below? And could you inform us of the outcome of your thinking which you would consider helpful for the ecumenical discussion? This is an earnest and urgent request.

There is also some other material on this New Delhi subject:

1) The chapter on "Witness" in the World Council of Churches' booklet "Jesus Christ - The Light of the World", read perhaps in conjunction with Victor E.W. Hayward's report "Comments on the 'Witness' Section of the Pre-Assembly Booklet" (Ecumenical Review 13, 1960/61, 506-509);

2) the proposals about "Future Studies on Evangelism" (Monthly Letter Nos. 6-8, November 1960), which, among other problems, the New Delhi Committee on the Department on Studies in Evangelism will have to discuss.

Below is an abbreviated version of the agenda for the Section on "Witness" containing some of the annotations from previous ecumenical discussions:-

REFERAT FÜR EVANGELISATION · STUDIENABTEILUNG · OEKUMENISCHER RAT DER KIRCHEN

DEPARTMENT ON EVANGELISM · DIVISION OF STUDIES · WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

DÉPARTEMENT D'ÉVANGÉLISATION · DIVISION DES ÉTUDES · CONSEIL ŒCUMÉNIQUE DES ÉGLISES

Delegates at the Willingen meeting of the International Missionary Council nine years ago proclaimed "we meet ... as a fellowship of those who are committed to the carrying out of Christ's commission to preach the Gospel to every creature". Here at New Delhi the implications of Integration are that we now meet as a fellowship of Churches "committed to the carrying out of Christ's commission to preach the Gospel to every creature".

At Evanston the Churches affirmed their faith in Jesus Christ as the hope of the world. In Him God came, and comes, and is to come into this world of needy, sinful men. In Him the new world (aion) is revealed, in Him man is given a future, God's Kingdom is proclaimed - and we are placed under judgment (crisis). For His coming means crisis.

1. Crisis and Witness.

(a) In Jesus Christ God intervenes decisively in human history. Now is the critical moment - God is in Christ revealing through the Holy Spirit the truth of man's existence, the real situation in which he stands, and his destiny. There is no escape from this truth - the Holy Spirit confronts us with it. We are thus convicted, caught in the crisis, which demands a response of commitment here and now. Cf. John 16: 8-11; Rom. 13: 11; II Cor. 6: 2; Heb. 3: 13-15. This is the only real crisis. All the crises into which we are drawn - especially by the ideological and religious movements of today, but also our human uncertainties - are ultimately intelligible only in terms of that crisis.

- Is this really what the Gospel is about? Is this what we expect God to be and to do?

- If we cannot witness unless we have a common conviction as to what this crisis is, that is, what the Gospel is about, what, then, is our common understanding of the crisis?

(Here the members of the Section are reminded of the following paragraph of the Evanston Report on the Main Theme:)

> "On Calvary God's Kingdom and the kingdom of this world met. Whoever has lived through Good Friday and Easter Day has the key to final judgment and eternal life. To him has been demonstrated the fragility of this world in comparison with the immense stability of that world which Christ brought within human reach. At the Cross God condemned the world which turns from Him and hates Him. In the coming Day this condemnation will be revealed in all its terrible finality. At the same Cross God accepted the world and disclosed how much He loves it. In the coming Day this loving acceptance will be revealed in all its unsearchable riches. Confidence in this terrible and glorious consummation of all things in Christ means neither that the history of this world will be swept aside as irrelevant, nor that our efforts will be finally crowned with success. The long history of this world which God created and sustains from day to day,

and for the sake of which He sent His Son, is not rendered meaningless by the coming of His Kingdom. Nor, on the other hand, is His Kingdom simply the final outcome of this world's history. There is no straight line from the labours of men to the Kingdom of God. He rejects that history of which man fancies himself to be the centre, creator, and lord; He accepts that history whose beginning, middle, and end He Himself fixes and determines."

(b) In Is. 2: 2-4 is the promise: "It shall come to pass in the latter days that ... many peoples shall come, and say: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord ... that he may teach us his ways ... He shall judge between the nations". When Greeks as representatives for all mankind asked, "We would see Jesus", Jesus Himself declared: "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified.- Now is the judgment (crisis) of this world ... " (John 12: 23, 31 cf. 12: 44-50).

- Can we, starting from an exegesis of O.T. and N.T. Scripture, begin to answer the question "Why witness?" in a scriptural way? Can we make clear to all why witness is obligatory and yet spontaneous, continuous and yet urgent?

- Can we in the same connection understand the high significance of the Church in God's time of witness (marturia)?

(The Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council stated:)

"The Christian world mission in Christ's, not ours. Prior to all our efforts and activities, prior to all our gifts of service and devotion, God sent His Son into the world. And He came in the form of a servant - a servant who suffered even to the death of the Cross. This (i ) the only true motive of Christian mission and the only standard by which the spirit, method and modes of Christian missionary organization must be judged. We believe it is urgent that this word of judgment and mercy should be given full freedom to cleanse and redeem our present activities, lest our human pride in our activities hinder the free course of God's mission in the world."

(c) More than ever before we recognize that our shaken world needs the witness of all Christians in all places. But what if we actually conceive of this witness as a means of conserving our own existence?

- What is our situation in 1961? In which way and in what sense do the great world movements which stir men today reflect God's "critical" action?

- How can we translate "crisis" (in the biblical sense) for those men who self-consciously live by secular systems or who give themselves to the resurgent religions; how can they understand themselves in the light of the Gospel?

- What precisely, in this situation, does "crisis" mean for the churches and their present witness?

(In an working paper of the Department on Evangelism it was asked in 1955:)

"In what sense is Jesus Christ our authority, and to what do we appeal? Do we appeal to men verbally in the name of Jesus Christ, but actually in the name of the activities of the Church, saying to them that here they will find a wonderful fellowship, or that the Church is necessary to civilization, or that the Church provides security? If so, we have shifted our authority from Jesus Christ to the works of the Church. Or do we appeal on the authority of what the Church says about Jesus Christ, urging men to accept the eternal truths, and thus stand on the side of the great company who choose truth from falsehood? If so we have shifted from an appeal which stems from the authority of Christ, to one which rests upon the authority of Dogma. Or is our authority the authority of the virtuous life exemplified by Jesus, and which 'pays'? If so we have again shifted our base of authority."

2. The Uniqueness of Christ.

(a) Many who would gladly concede to Jesus Christ the foremost place among the sons of men are either scandalized by the claims which the churches make on His behalf, or do not see their relevance. In the atmosphere today of greater understanding and deeper appreciation of other living faiths, many are offended by any superior claims made for the Christian faith. Christian opposition to syncretistic religion is widely resented as out of keeping with modern temper and philosophy. Yet the crisis arises from the claims which Jesus made for Himself, as well as those for which His early followers gladly laid down their lives. Cf. Luke 10: 22; John 14: 6; Gal. 1: 8; I Tim 2: 5-6. From us also He asks "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8: 29).

- In what sense do we maintain the apostolic claim that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12)?

- Does the uniqueness of Christ mean that the claims of other religions and ideologies are absolutely excluded, or does it provide for the inclusion of them, or of elements in them. If so, how? (Cf. John 1: 1-14; Heb. 1: 1-2.)

- What are the implications of all this for our attitude towards the adherents of other religions and of "secular faiths" and for those who believe just in "religion"?

(b) The claims of Christ present a crisis for the churches, as well as for the world.

- Do we believe that "outside the Church there is no salvation"? If so, in what sense? If not, what relation has the Church to the Gospel?

- What has to be done with those Christians, especially protestants, who live "in faith" but outside their churches' life?

- What has to be said to those Christians who because of their churches' "sociological captivity" consciously decided to be witnesses without direct connection with their churches?

- How can the churches really submit themselves constantly to the judgment of Christ, and to being renewed according to the Gospel?

(Those questions are annotated with questions of G.R. Wickham:)

"May we not say that God in His mercy, will not allow the world to come into the Church as she now is? That it would be dreadful if our churches as at present conditioned, were thronged with people seeking membership? May it now be that God will not allow the Church to convert the world, unless the Church is adequate to the needs of the world - that He won't let us succeed at the wrong task?"

3. Possibilities for Communication.

(a) We are becoming increasingly aware of grave difficulties in the field of communication. These difficulties, however, are not just a contemporary phenomenon, although the twentieth century has its own problems. Communication of the Gospel always involves the crisis of a breakthrough to man's real situation. This is the essential difficulty. Here it is important that we understand and analyse the factors which give rise to our specific problems today. It is also important that we recognize that all communication of the Gospel is a miracle - the work of the Holy Spirit.

- Are Christians today (a) too close, (b) not close enough to other men to preach the Gospel?

- How are the Bible and the Gospel (a) near to, and (b) distant from, twentieth century men?

- What in the world and in our churches hinders communication?

(b) The Gospel is not communicated simply by making our language intelligible, but even more by realistically relating the Good News to men and women in their present predicaments.

- What kinds of translation (verbal and non-verbal) advance genuine communication of the Gospel?

- In what way is it legitimate to speak of God as being at work in contemporary revolutionary changes - in struggles for international peace, for economic and social justice, and for recial equality; in the growth of one world-wide secular civilization; in the very resurgence of other great religions; in man's essays in the conquest

of outer space? Can and how should evangelism today address itself to such aspects of the twentieth century scene?

- What distinguishes the churches' prophetic witness from merely human judgment on contemporary situations? Does any element of urgency in the evangelistic task derive from things which happen in the world today?

- Are there signs of growth in the life of the churches here and there which would help other churches in their witness in the contemporary situation?

(In the 1959 Report on "The Lordship of Christ over the World and the Church" it was said:)

"Both by open criticism and voiceless patient endurance of injustice and tyranny, the Church confesses the Lordship of Christ over all political and social institutions. Whether or not invited to speak, it warns men against idolatries of every sort and testifies that all these agencies are not ultimate realitites but authorities receiving their proper functions from God (Rom. 13, 1). Nevertheless the Church must beware at all time of uncritical identification with particular structures, cultures, programmes, or ideologies which invite her support (Luke 17, 20 f.). Amidst hostile orders the Church continues to affirm unwavering loyalty to Christ, fellowship with Christians across racial and national divisions, and steadfast hope in God's new order beyond this provisional human situation.- In the judgments of God implied in present events the Church recognizes the foreshadowing of the Last Judgment and the signs of the new order where blessing, peace and righteousness will prevail. The eschatological visions of the Messianic Kingdom constitute both the sentence of judgment upon and the way of deliverance for all existing societies. They provide in broad outline a picture of God's purpose to bring to consummation His sovereignty over His entire creation. They enable the Church to keep its gaze fixed on God's final purpose and provide it with a compulsion to shape its present life in their light."

(c) Communication is not only made through words. There are other levels of communication that operate through living Christian communities which are sensitive to the real life of man in his communities and can express themselves and listen to other men and groups. This implies communication <u>between</u> and <u>with</u>, if there is to be communication <u>of</u> and <u>to</u>.

- Should the churches only proclaim as from a platform, or should they also use natural lines of communication among men? What are the most important of these?

- What kinds of common life are necessary before true communication can take place with (a) religious men, and (b) non-religious men?

- Where are new opportunities for communication to be found? What especially can we do about the situation in the inner cities?

(The Report of Section II of the Evanston Assembly declared:)

"The Church which God uses to communicate the Gospel is a fellowship, a koinonia, drawn and held together by the love of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and by the need and desire of its members to share this experience with each other, and to draw those outside into that koinonia. The evangelizing Church will offer this gift in its preaching and teaching; in its acts of worship and administration of its sacraments; through the individual and group witness of its members; by leading its people to base their life upon God's Word used in personal and family devotions; by fostering small fellowships; and by works of social service."

(d) We are all too apt to think of witness in terms of faithful obedience, whereas in The Acts of the Apostles, for example, it is consistently depicted as the spontaneous result of the power of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1: 8; 2: 38-39; 4: 8,13,31; 7: 55-60; 9: 31; 10: 44-48; et al).

- To what extent can churches today claim that their life is placed under the creative direction of the Holy Spirit?

- How could our church life be so organized as to "stir up the gift of God" (II Tim. 1:6) and not hinder the power of the Spirit in the daily life and witness of Christians in the world? What is the right way to enable church members (laity!) to recognize and respond to their calling to mission? How can church life be made open so as to use individuals of special gifts?

- How much freedom is and can be given to congregations which arise and seek to live in a non-traditional way?

4. The Reshaping of the Witnessing Community.

(a) Discussion has made clear that, on the one hand, our present witness is deeply dependent on our existing structures and patterns of church life and that, on the other hand, these need to be renewed and reformed for a more dynamic witness. Because of their connection with the urgency of witness, questions on structure and patterns themselves become urgent.

- Is Christian witness essentially individual or corporate? (Cf. I Pet. 2: 9-10.)

- To what degree do existing patterns of church life affect proclamation and witness? Is it true that many churches are structured in such a way that they can meet man only in villages or suburban situations?

(b) "The time has come of judgment (crisis) to begin with the household of God". (I Pet. 4: 17.) The crisis of the witnessing community is that God continues to reshape His people. It is not our task to say how God is doing so, but rather to be patiently open to His guiding by our present faithfulness, and to be willing for Him either to pour new life into old forms or to move us to discover fresh forms.

- Do we expect God to reshape His community? Can we discern ways in which God is already reshaping His community, both within and outside traditional forms? What fresh obedience is required of us?

- What forms of church life and fellowship make some churches apparently more effective in their witness than others?

- What are the marks of a witnessing community, in a truly missionary church?

(c) We have experienced the dissolution of traditional Christendom (Corpus Christianum), and we have learned that "the home-base is everywhere". The new situation demands a new understanding of our tasks; traditional teachings seem no longer valid. We know that the churches are called to "total mission".

- What is the relationship of mission and evangelism? Are they synonymous? If not, what are the differentia, and what are their implications for witness? Or have mission and evangelism to be described in completely new terms? What distinguishes genuine mission/evangelism from the mere expansion of church life?

- What is the true relationship of "witness" and "pastoral concern"?

(In the New Delhi Work Book it is said:)

"The outsider is already frequently a sharer in group life in the secular world - a labour union or a work group or a 'teen-age gang', or a neighbourhood athletic club.- ... every congregation is called upon to become a fellowship so clearly witnessing to Christian brotherhood that it can witness as from community to community."

(d) We have agreed that we must "let the Church be the Church"; we understand that the Church is the one pilgrim people of God, called to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth in witness to God's mercy.

- What practical advice have we to give to churches and congregations in the West and in the East, as well as to missionary societies and institutions, regarding their immediate task and their mutual relationships?

- What are the implications for the truly witnessing community of the wider dimensions of evangelism? Are evangelism and service really connected?

- What can we do about the distortion and frustration of Christian witness which occur while churches remain disunited? The Constitution of Faith and Order contains the following phrase: "To proclaim the essential oneness of the Church of Christ and to keep prominently before the World Council and the churches the obligation to manifest that unity and its urgency for the work of evangelism." What is the urgency of unity for world mission and evangelism?

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PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM THE DEPARTMENT ON EVANGELISM :

Evangelism in France, 1952, 58 pp. Sw.frs. 1.20; 2s.; $ 0.50

Evangelism in Scotland, 1954, 56 pp. Sw.frs. 1.20; 2s.; $ 0.50

Evangelism's Threefold Witness Kerygma, Koinonia, Diakonia, by Theodore O. Wedel, (offprint 1957), 15 pp. Sw.frs. 0.40; 8s.; $ 0.10

Evangelism in Latin America, by Rudolf Obermüller, 1957, 32 pp. Sw.frs. 1.20; 2s.; $ 0.50

Das Evangelium in Lateinamerika, von Rudolf Obermüller, 1958, Sw.frs. 1.-; 1s.8d.; $ 0.30; DM 1.- 52 pp.

Evangelism in the United States, by George Sweazey, 1958, 30 pp. Sw.frs. 1.20; 2s.; $ 0.50

Resurgent Religions, by S. Kulandran, 1957, 32 pp. Sw.frs. 1.20; 2s.; $ 0.50

Réveil des religions non-chrétiennes, par S. Kulandran, 1958, 36 pp. Sw.frs. 1.20; 2s.; $ 0.50

Evangelism and Politics, par Philippe Maury, 1959, 48 pp. Sw.frs. 1.20; 2s.; $ 0.50

A Theological Reflection on the Work of Evangelism, 1959, 46 pp. Sw.frs. 1.25; 2s.; $ 0.50

Eine theologische Besinnung über die Evangelisation, 1959, 42 pp. Sw.frs./DM 1.25; 2s.; $ 0.50

Une réflexion théologique sur l'évangélisation, 1959 (mimeographed), 40 pp. Sw.frs. 1.25; 2s.; $ 0.50

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